

MINUTES

BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

February 19, 2015

Flynn Pavilion
Near intersection of Picnic Way and Loiter Way
Belle Isle, Detroit, MI 48207

Present for Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee (BIPAC)

Michele Hodges, chair
Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr., vice chair
Michael Curis
Alicia Bradford
Sommer Woods

Absent for Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee

Bud Denker – excused
Bryan Barnhill

Committee chairperson **Hodges** called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. She welcomed those in attendance, gave a brief overview of the Flynn Pavilion and a summary of the purpose of the committee, and members of the committee introduced themselves.

Approval of October 23, 2014, Minutes

Curis made a motion that minutes of the October 23, 2014, meeting be approved as submitted. **Bradford** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Excused Absence

Bradford made a motion that the excused absence of committee member **Denker** be approved. **Curis** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Adoption of Strategic Plan

Hodges highlighted priorities and goals in the strategic plan that was developed during the December 16, 2014, planning session and said she feels confident the committee is in alignment with the Department of Natural Resources and the Belle Isle Park Conservancy, to make the park great for everyone. **Bradford** made a motion that the Strategic Plan developed during the December 16, 2014, planning session be adopted. **Woods** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Report to Detroit City Council

Hodges noted that the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee is required to present annual reports to the Detroit City Council. She gave a summary and highlights of the presentation, and each BIPAC member was provided with a copy of the PowerPoint, which also is posted on the DNR website. **Hodges** reported that presenters were given a very warm welcome by city council members. **Curis** congratulated **Hodges**, **Peek** and DNR staff members for their excellent presentation.

Concessions and Other Vendor Selection Results for 2015

Hodges gave an overview of the selection results for island concessions and other vendors for 2015. **Brenda Mikula**, concession/lease manager with the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, was on hand to explain the selection process and answer any questions and gave a detailed report on the process, indicating that 12 concession opportunities were offered; 28 bids were received and of those, 10 were Detroit companies; and Detroit companies were awarded 4 of the 12 contracts. Several committee members had questions regarding how the winning bidders were chosen and if there are other opportunities available. **Mikula** outlined the selection process, noting that the selection panel looked at the best value. She said there are no other opportunities available at the present time but noted that unsuccessful bidders can appeal. Both **Bradford** and **Woods** questioned the low number of Detroit bidders who were awarded contracts and were surprised there wasn't a larger response to the request for bids. **Peek** stated there needs to be better outreach and a community component to push the message so more Detroiters know about the opportunity. **Olson** agreed that the process is new and not perfect but a big step forward. He said the vendor bidding process will be evaluated at the end of the 2015 season, and it will be better in the future.

General/Belle Isle Conservancy Updates

Hodges gave updates on a Cultural Campus Plan with a focus on the aquarium and conservatory, as well as a strategic plan for the Belle Isle Conservancy.

Hodges and **Olson** talked about the physical assessment of the Scott Fountain and the amount of money for short- and long-term solutions to sustain the fountain. It is estimated that tens of millions of dollars will be needed to update and repair the fountain that was built in 1917.

Hodges and **Olson** also talked about the broken lights on the bridge to the island. They agreed it is the first impression of Belle Isle, and the lights need to be fixed. They mentioned a possible partnership with the Adopt-A-Watt program and the Michigan Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources, and the lighting authority.

Hodges noted that plans for the World Cup of Gardening event are going forward for a tentative date in June 2016. She said partnerships are continuing to be formed and a memorandum of understanding is being worked on. **Olson** explained the internationally flower show had been pushed back from 2015 to 2016 because the group was not set up logistically to carry out the plan.

Hodges announced that Penske has donated 1,000 Recreation Passports and advised that a booth will be installed at the entrance to the island where passports can be obtained. She talked about the media strategy regarding promotion of Recreation Passports, season opening, etc. **Hodges** also noted that a Detroit revitalization fellow has been hired to help with community engagement.

Staffing Update

Karis Floyd, manager of Belle Isle State Park, introduced **Theresa Bryan** as the new full-time ranger for the Pontiac Recreation Area and Fort Custer State Park. It also was announced that **Jeremy Kemp** was hired as the head horticulturist for Belle Isle Park and the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory. It was noted that **Kemp** was previously employed at Chicago's Lincoln Park. **Olson** added that **Dan Lord** was promoted in the DNR to facilities, operations and support section manager in the Finance & Operations Division, a new urban planner position will be created for the Michigan Outdoor Adventure Center. It was also announced that notice for a full-time, assistant events programming specialist position for Belle Isle will be posted soon.

Law Enforcement Update

Michigan State Police **Lt. Nathan McQueen** gave a law enforcement update, reporting that things are going well and are slower during the winter. He said that although there was some hesitation and resistance at first, law enforcement officers have gotten to know most of the regular visitors to the island and have had positive feedback. He said citizens are courteous and are taking ownership of the island, keeping it clean and safe. He noted that nearly all facilities on the island are booked for the upcoming season.

Status of Grant Applications

Olson gave a summary of grants that have been applied for, including an additional \$2.5 million to invest in infrastructure. He said the fact that the park has gained national attention helps in receiving grants.

Public Comments

Public comments began at 10:25 a.m. and included:

Helen Gentry, Detroit resident and member of Women Creating Caring Communities, referring to a November 9, 2014, Detroit Free Press article written by Carol Cain, said she would like the committee to support Governor Snyder's attempt to secure two giant pandas for a zoo in Detroit during his trade mission to China; and she thinks what better place for the bears than Belle Isle. She further communicated that she thinks the Grand Prix contract shouldn't be renewed unless the organization agree to pay for the pandas, including China, the employees, and the exhibit on Belle Isle.

Julie Dinan, president of Friends of Detroit Rowing, commented that she is so pleased to be a partner of Belle Isle and has seen so much improvement since it became a state park. She also shares the passion in the rehabilitation of the island.

Alex Howbert, owner, Detroit River Sports, an unsuccessful bidder for a kayak rental contract, thinks it's a mistake to group kayak rental, bike rental and snow sports together and feels the issue should be revisited. Because of the contract, no other company is allowed to launch tours on the river because of a potential conflict. He feels there is no conflict and would like to be able to launch his tours from the island. He ended by saying he is excited about all the positive changes taking place on the island.

Kelli Kavanaugh, owner, Wheelhouse Detroit, said she also is disappointed in the way the contracts were awarded and agrees with **Alex Howbert** and committee member **Woods** who feels contracts should be awarded to more city of Detroit local businesses.

Vittoria Katanski, executive director of HATCH Detroit, agreed with the two previous public comments and supports Detroit River Sports and Wheelhouse Detroit. She said she is concerned about the lack of Detroit businesses that were awarded concession/vendor contracts. **Katanski** feels no one knows the island better than local businesses and thinks prohibiting Detroit River Sports from launching from the island is unfair. She is unhappy with the evaluation process and thinks summer/winter sports shouldn't be grouped together. She also thinks the process is stifling Detroit businesses.

"Mebby" Pearson is a member of the Friends of Belle Isle's stewardship committee that is working to rid the island's habitat of invasive species. She wondered why snowmobiles are allowed in the forests on the island when motorcycles are not. She thinks they should not be allowed and there should be rules. **Ron Olson** said he would take a look at the issue. **Pearson** also advised that the Detroit Rotarians are putting in a garden at the police station and are in the process of fundraising.

Bruce Ross, mentor with Youth Connection, Detroit, talked about the internship program and reported that several young people have secured full-time jobs on the island.

Carol White, Belle Isle Aquarium, noted that she had been told by a DNR Parks and Recreation staff member that snowmobiles were prohibited except on clearly marked trails and were being ticketed. **White** also said she thinks the proposed booth at the front of the island is confusing to the general public and needs to be clearer. She also asked if the ice cream vendor is mobile or stationary. She has received complaints at the aquarium about the music and fumes from the truck.

Public appearances closed at 10:40 p.m.

Belle Isle Aquarium Presentation

Vance Patrick, board member of the Belle Isle Park Conservancy, gave a summary of updates to projects at the Belle Isle Aquarium, which is the oldest urban aquarium in the United States, developed in 1904, and is run by volunteers. He talked about the coy transfer from the outside pond to the basement of the aquarium where they spend the winter each year until they are transferred back to the outside pond in the spring. **Patrick** also gave an update on the *Light Up the Aquarium* fundraiser event to help bring back the electric eel exhibit and reported there are now two electric eels at the aquarium as well as stingrays that were added in 2014. He noted that the aquarium is available for occasions such as weddings, birthday parties, school and community group tours and events, etc.

Committee Member/Staff Comments

Hodges introduced **Louise Klarr**, member of the Natural Resources Commission, who was in attendance and thanked committee member **Michael Curis** and **Big Boy** for furnishing refreshments for the meeting.

Peek said he is concerned with the vendor selection process but thinks things are going in the right direction. He continues to feel the committee must be kept informed of all Belle Isle Park issues.

Bradford asked that the river launching from the island issue be reviewed and commended the DNR for all the improvements made to the island so far.

Woods also is concerned about the process for selecting vendors and still feels more Detroiters should be awarded contracts. She also thinks launch access from the island should be allowed and that Detroit businesses that have used the island for a long time should not be prohibited. **Woods** feels there is an issue with the passport booth and asked how it will work. It was explained that there is a temporary booth until a contract for a permanent booth is awarded; the winner of that bid should be announced in a couple weeks. The booth will be in the middle of the road with room for vehicles to pass on both sides. **Olson** added that police will not be enforcing the passports, but park rangers will be enforcing them in the parking lots.

Karis Floyd announced that if anyone has any questions or comments, they should contact him. He said that he and Jolene Priest with the DNR will be available to help with communicating with the public.

Curis mentioned that he thinks the committee should meet monthly instead of bi-monthly. It was agreed that the annual schedule would be redone to include monthly meetings for 2015.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by **Bradford**, seconded by **Peek**, and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:14 a.m.

APPROVED: Date _____

Michele Hodges
BIPAC Chairperson

Ron Olson
DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief